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Entertainment Values in American Satire and Regular News Broadcasts

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Introduction

- Observation:** News programs are evolving to maximize audiences by incorporating entertainment values, like dramatic framing, audiovisual elements, and audience interaction, even taking the form of satirical programming.
- Research Question:** How do traditional and satirical news programs incorporate entertainment values into broadcasts?
- Hypothesis:** Cable news will cover more hard topics, like crime, and more conflict. Network news will cover more soft news topics, including celebrities, sports, and surprising events.

Sampled Shows

- Cable News**
 - Anderson Cooper 360° (CNN)
 - Special Report (FNC)
 - The Rachel Maddow Show (MSNBC)
- Network News**
 - ABC World News
 - NBC Nightly News
- Satire Shows**
 - The Daily Show
 - The Colbert Report



Methods

Content Analysis

- We conducted content analysis on network, cable, and satire newscasts across two constructed weeks in 2014.
- Five coders analyzed the newscasts. Reliability was ensured for the content coding (Krippendorff's α) and itemization (Guetzkow's U).
- In the coding process, each newscast was identified and itemized into news items, then itemized for actors. After itemization, news items and actors were coded into a codebook spreadsheet for the variables of interest.

	News Item Level	Actor Level
Itemization	$U = 0.011$	$U = 0.022$
Coding	$\alpha = 0.735$	$\alpha = 0.815$

Figure A: Reliability measures for both the content of coding and itemization.

Units of Analysis

- 96 newscasts, 1,211 news items, and 2,401 actors were coded**
- Unit 1: Newscast**
 - Length
 - Air Date
 - Time
- Unit 2: News Item**
 - Style, topic, duration, position
 - Horse race, conflict or agreement
 - Audience activity, headlines, split screen
 - Maps, text, or photos
 - Actor presentation and evaluation
- Unit 3: Main Actors**
 - Name and type of actor
 - Ideological affiliation
 - Actor presentation and evaluation

Discussion

- The inclusion of specific values in news presentations make them more likely to be covered. These news values include: negativity, conflict; unexpectedness, novelty; prominence, proximity.
- Increasing competition in news media has shifted media coverage from hard news to soft news, resulting in increased sensationalism in today's media. Our results found:
 - The length of news items in network and cable news averages 2.05 minutes. Satire news devotes roughly twice as much time to each news item.
 - Accidents and crime, party matters, and lifestyle/celebrities are the most common topics.
 - Roughly 75 percent of news items is local or national in focus.
 - Coverage of conflict significantly surpasses coverage of agreement.
 - President Obama is the most commonly featured actor. Ordinary citizens, especially victims of crime, are the second most common.

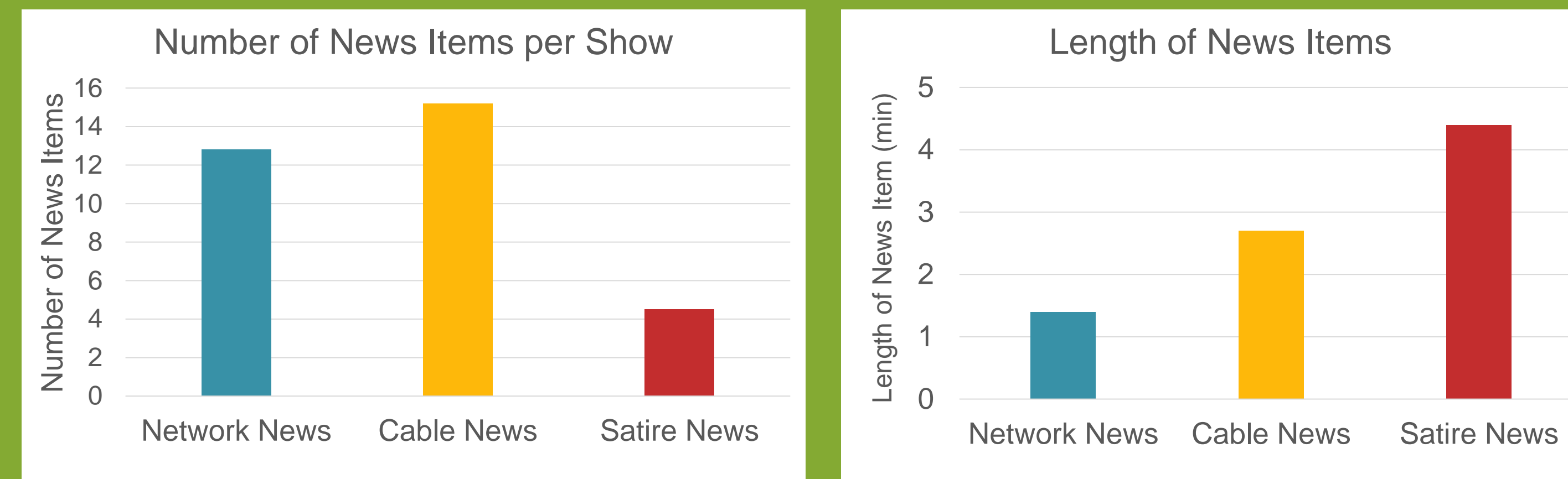
- By making the news more entertaining, does the news media adequately inform citizens, and are citizens prepared to participate in society?

- Does sensationalized media fuel political alienation and cynical world views?

Results

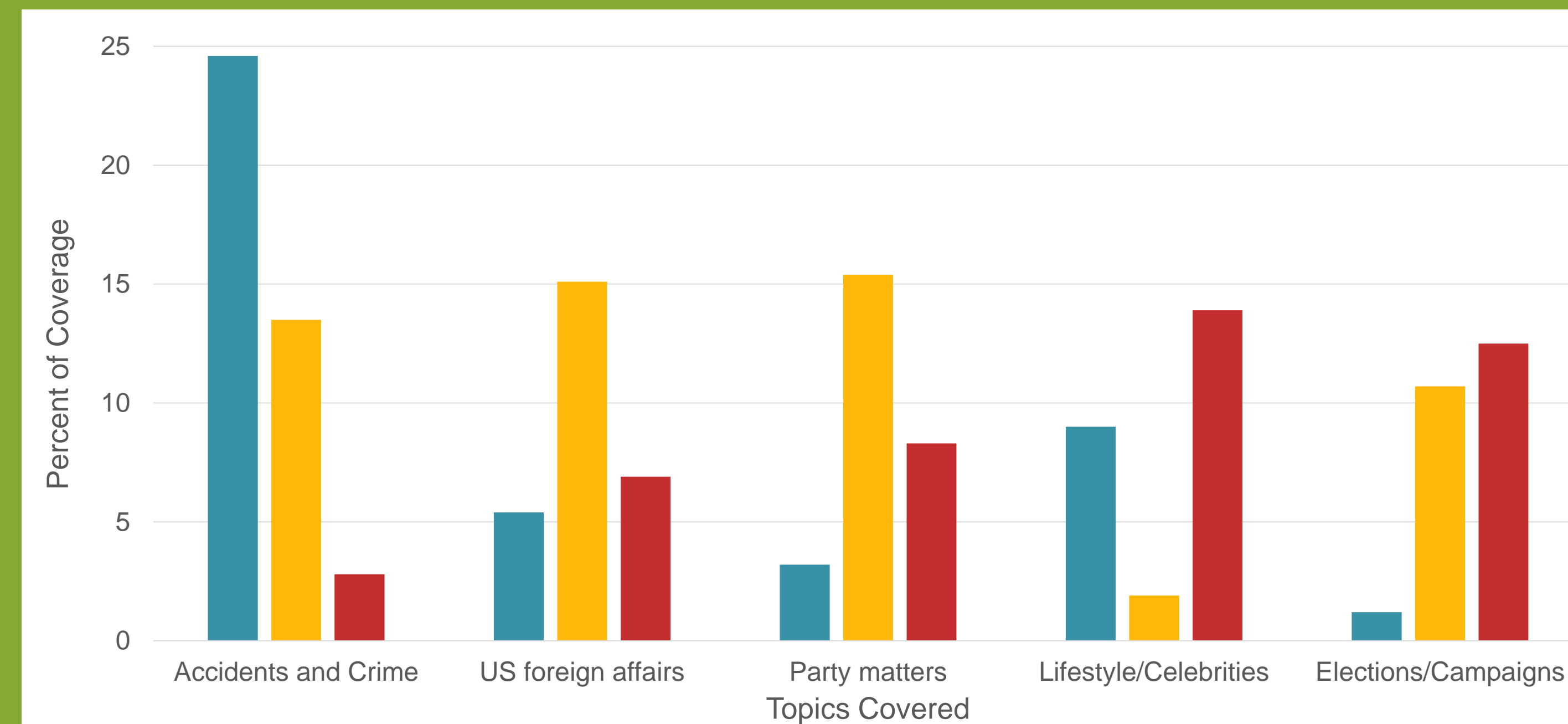
■ Network News (N = 410) ■ Cable News (N = 728) ■ Satire News (N = 72)

Number and Length of News Items



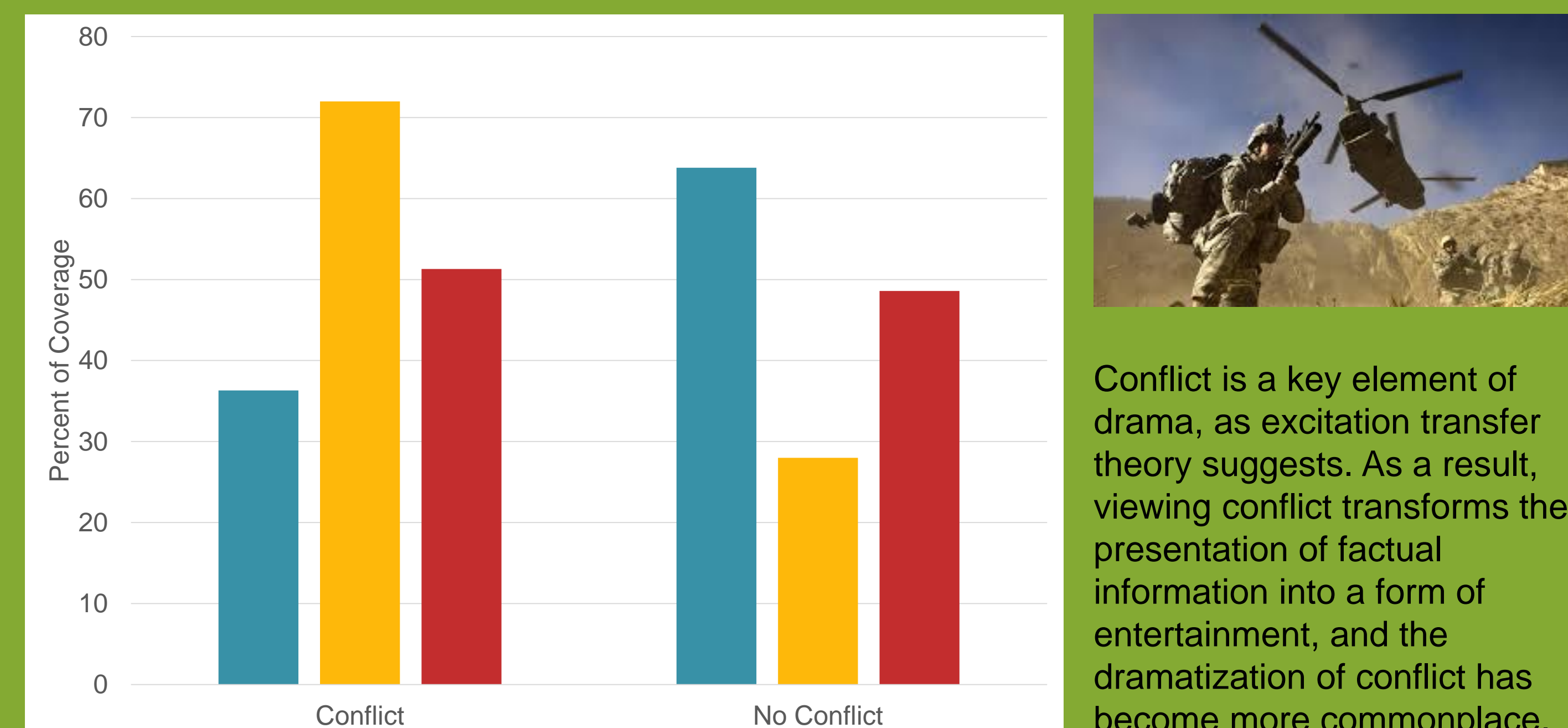
Cable news covers the most news items, but satire news devotes the most time to each item.

Topics Covered



Accidents, crime and disaster news was most common topic in network newscasts. Cable news covered the most party matters and foreign affairs. Satire news featured the most lifestyle news.

Conflict vs. Agreement



Conflict is a key element of drama, as excitation transfer theory suggests. As a result, viewing conflict transforms the presentation of factual information into a form of entertainment, and the dramatization of conflict has become more commonplace.

Actors

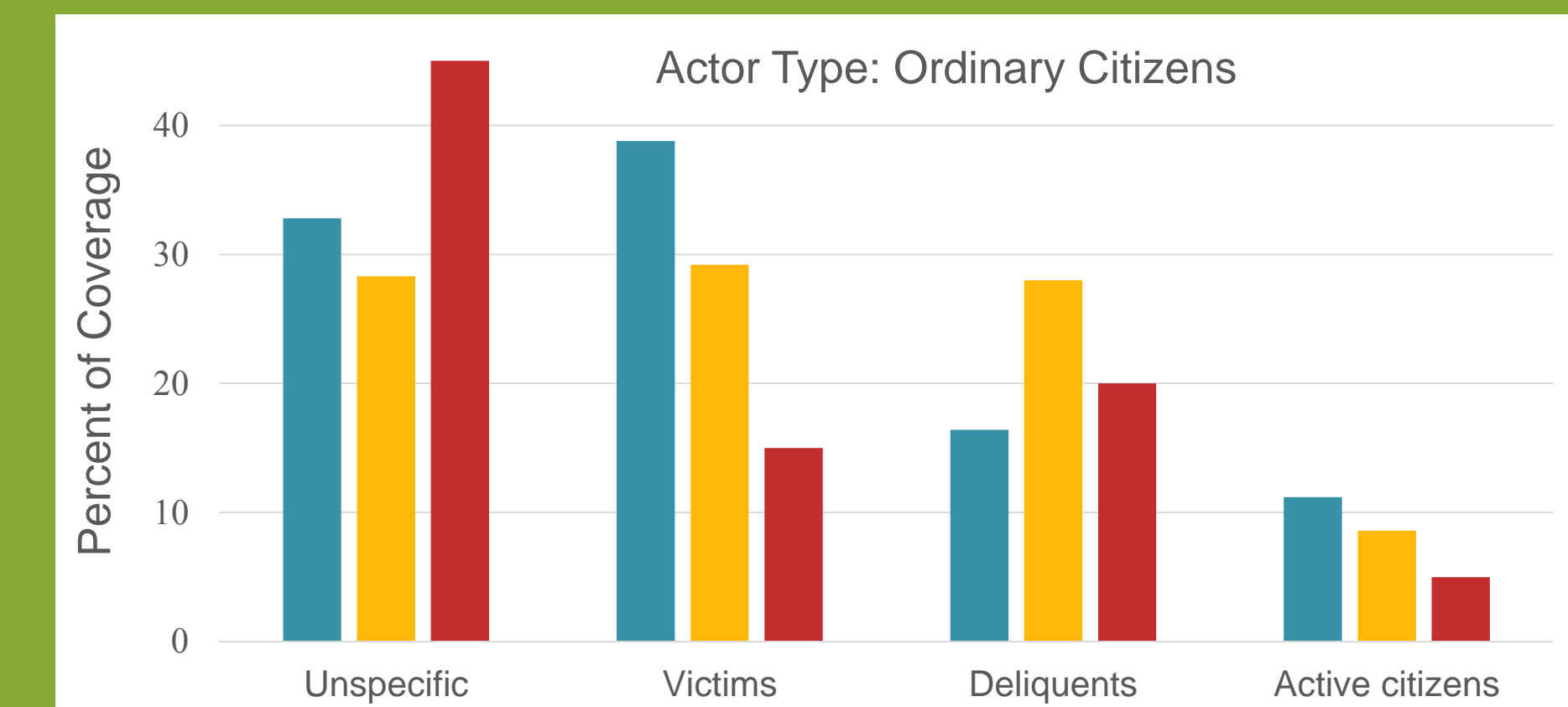
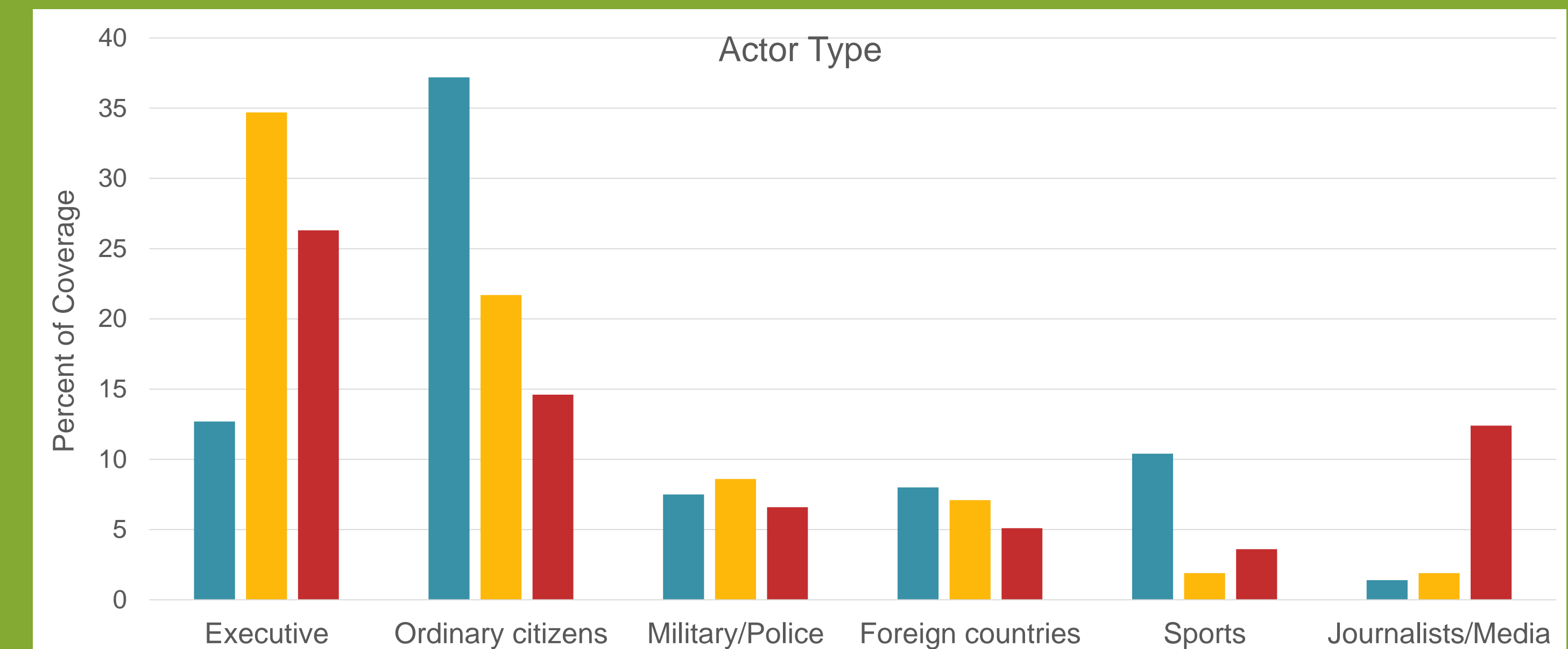


Figure B: Ordinary Citizens were the second most common actor, following the executive branch of government.

President Barack Obama and actors from the executive branch were the most common actors featured overall, but ordinary citizens were most common in network news. The second chart breaks down ordinary citizens into further subgroups. Of specified ordinary citizens, victims were most likely to be featured, especially in network news.

Geographic Focus

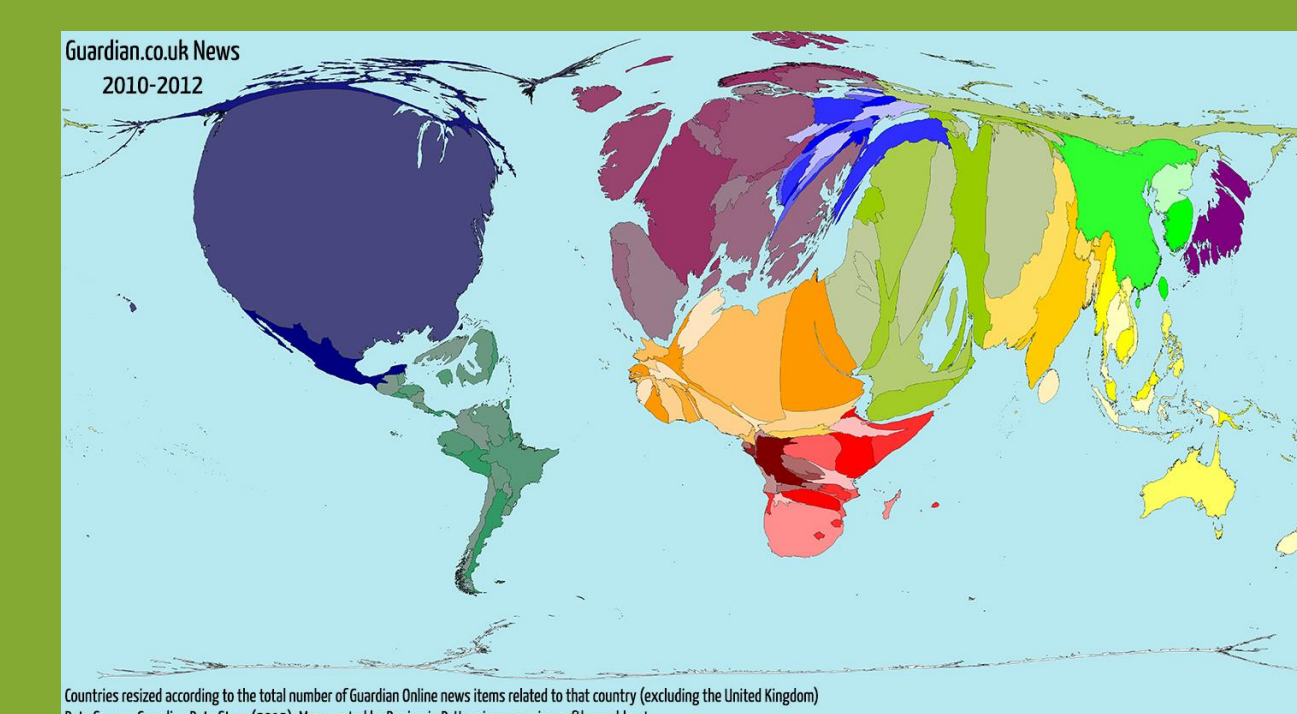
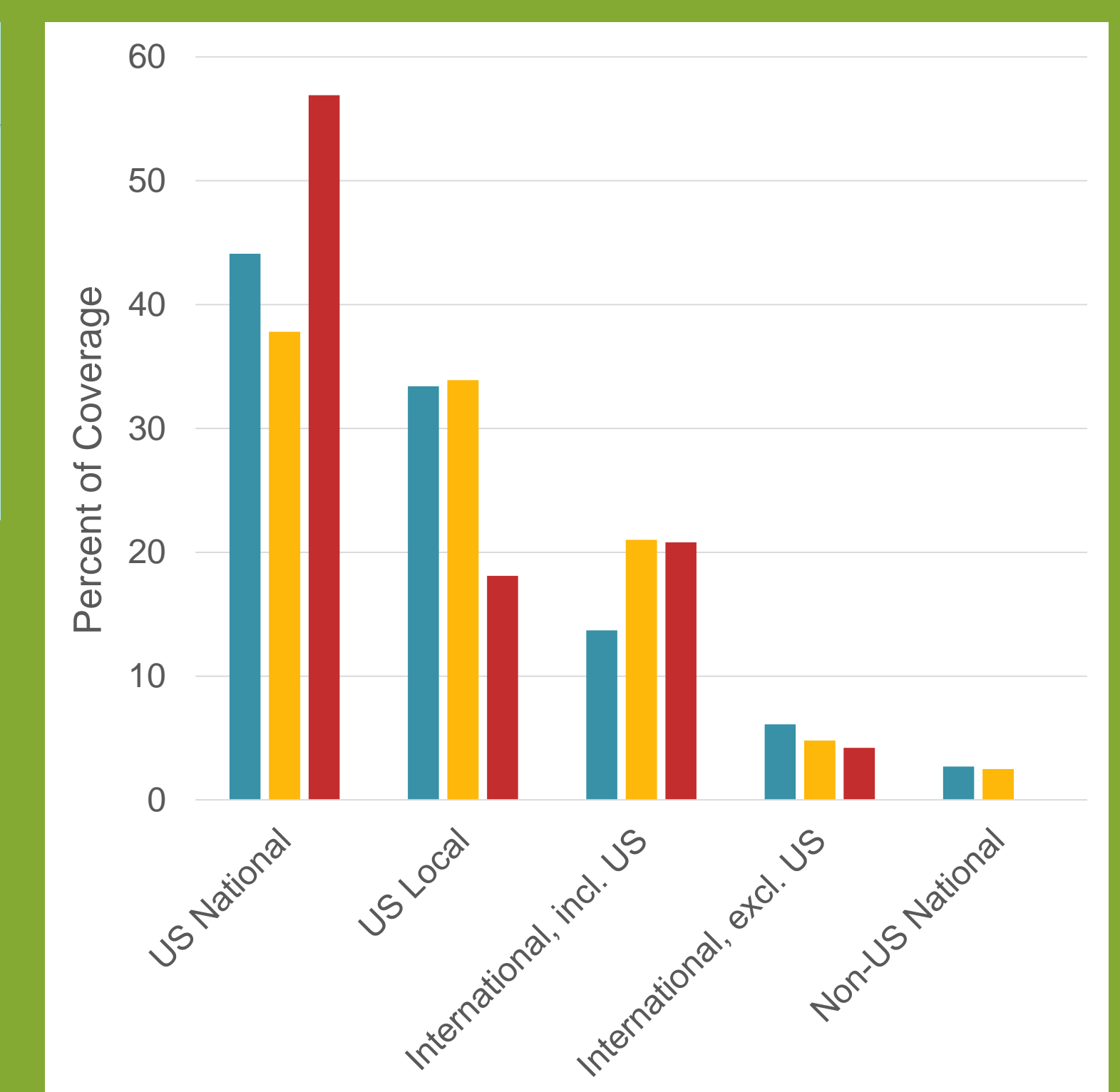


Figure C: This map portrays a special distribution of areas with the most frequent news coverage.

A majority of newscasts from network, cable, and satire news focused on U.S. domestic issues. Less news focused on international issues, and of international news, the results show a bias toward U.S. foreign policy.



Future Directions

- Compare results from 2014 newscasts to results from an election year (particularly in terms of actors, conflict, and horse race).
- Compare television news with content analysis from print and radio media.
- Investigate the impact of news on behavioral outcomes.

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